

Interview with  
Louie Gonzales  
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We, of the Stockton chapter of the CSO, have gotten interested in the Bracero Program recently, due to Father McCullough talking to us, and one thing and another. Father McCullough told us of some of the bad things he had seen in the camps which he visits; and he told us that he, himself, is not in a position to take any action on those conditions. But, we don't have the same responsibilities he does, so what we do, is go around to the camps and ~~look~~ talk to the men there and look at conditions for ourselves. And, if we see anything that we think is really in need of correcting, we get in touch with Ernesto Galarza, and he either comes out and makes an inspection himself, or else he gets in touch with the authorities. There are seven or eight members of our committee who are doing this sort of thing.

You ask why we don't get in touch with the Consul or the compliance officer ourselves, well, on that I will tell you. Not very long ago up there, we had a big accident where a large number of braceros were being carried on the back of a truck which had no sides, no seats, no nothing; The driver was whipping around corners at 45 MPH or so, and several of the men fell off the truck and one was killed. Well, we thought that this was an open and shut case of failure to abide by the law, so we thought if it was taken to the proper authorities that surely some action would be taken. Well, Father McCullough got in touch with the compliance officer and the men themselves got in touch with the Consul in Sacramento; but, none of these people were interested, they never even bothered to come out to talk with the men, or to conduct any sort of investigation so, we decided that we pretty much had to try something else. So, like I say, now we get in touch with Dr. Galarza and he comes out and talks to



the men and he is sometimes able to get some action.

Some of the things that we have found are, for example, that a number of the camps have absolutely no transportation at night. The mayordomo goes home to Stockton, or wherever it may be, and leaves the men there alone, and none of them, of course, have automobiles; so, if a man gets sick during the night with appendicitis or something like that, it's just too bad, he will darn well have to wait until morning. To make things even worse, as you know if you have been up into the Delta country, a lot of these camps are located on islands, there is no way to get to the mainland except by ferry, and the ferryboats don't run at night, they usually close up around 8 ~~xxx~~ o'clock and don't open up again until 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning so there you are. Of course, the camps that are on the mainland are not quite so badly off, if a man gets sick in the night there, his friends can walk to some farmhouse maybe and put in a phone call, or maybe they can lug him down to the highway and flag down a passing car, or something like that.

Speaking of transportation, another thing that we found was, that in one camp about five miles out of town, the grower~~s~~ was charging the men \$2 a piece to take them into town in the evening. I don't know if that is allowed or not, but, anyway, that is what he was doing and the men didn't think it was quite fair; incidentally, in the same camp, the men were getting beans three times a day and nothing else but, They ~~are~~ were a little bit unhappy about that also.

I would say that it goes by camps. In a camp like the one I was talking about, nobody is satisfied; in other camps where we have been, nobody was dissatisfied. That's the way it goes. It seems either everybody complains, or else everything is swell.



Another thing I would say after going into quite a few of the camps around Stockton is, that it is the foremen that make it either a bad program ~~camp~~ or a good ~~camp~~ <sup>program</sup>. We've had men tell us that their crew leader was taking 15¢ out of each dollar they made. We've had other men tell us that their foreman was charging them \$1.50 to take their money into town and buy money-orders so that they could send it home to Mexico, he would charge them \$1.50 regardless of the amount they were sending. Well, now, these are the kind of foremen who are bad and who make it a bad program.

If you ever have a chance, you ought to look up the copies of the Stockton Record for September of last year, they had a series of six or seven articles defending the Bracero Program, showing that everything was 'peaches and cream'. For example, one of the things they played up big was how good the conditions are in the airport camp; this is a large camp just outside of Stockton which holds over a thousand men. They had some pictures showing some officials conducting a 'white glove' inspection in this camp. You know what a 'white glove' inspection is, don't you? Well, according to these pictures they would come out of the barracks with their white gloves perfectly spotless, so this was a model camp. Now, the funny part is, that right around the time this series of articles appeared, some of us had gone out to that camp just to look around. We found that a lot of the nationals had taken their bedding outside and were sleeping on the ground, and we asked them, "Why in the heck are you doing this?", they said they had to because the stink inside the barracks was so bad they couldn't stand it; these were the same barracks which the ~~the~~ "white glove" inspections had been made in.